

BX
9843
G36
R44
1848
GTU
Storage

THE RELATION OF THE PULPIT TO FUTURE AGES.

A

DISCOURSE

PREACHED BEFORE THE

MASSACHUSETTS CONVENTION

OF

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS,

JUNE 1, 1848.

[From the Christian Examiner.]

By EZRA S. GANNETT.

BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY & H. P. NICHOLS,

111 WASHINGTON STREET.

1848.

BX
9843
G36
R44
1848

CAMBRIDGE:
METCALF AND COMPANY,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

THE
RELATION OF THE PULPIT
TO
FUTURE AGES.

2 Timothy iv. 2. "Preach the word."

AMONG the functions of the Christian minister, the most peculiar, if not the most important, is preaching. With the discharge of this function both his pastoral duty and his private life have a close connection, modifying its character and being in turn themselves affected by its influence. The estimation in which the pulpit is held by the people cannot, therefore, be regarded by us ministers with indifference. The relation of the pulpit to the age is one of the great questions of our time, and of all times ; on the answer to which virtually depend the comfort, usefulness, and even existence of the clergy as a distinct class in the community. A disposition has been manifested in some quarters to depreciate preaching, to deny its special value, and to suggest doubts of its adaptation to the wants of the present, and much more of coming ages. It may not be a wholly gratuitous or inappropriate task to undertake a defence of the pulpit, to offer what in the old ecclesiastical language might be called an apology for preaching,—a vindication of this part of ministerial duty from the charge of belonging rather to past than to future times. I would show, that, on the contrary, the preacher will find, in the circumstances by which the progress of society will surround him, new opportunities for the exercise of his peculiar function, instruments and aids of which he may avail himself to render his position still more prominent and efficient. The day has not passed by for the pulpit. Its greatest triumphs have not yet been witnessed. There is in the present condition, and in what we can define of the

future history of the world, much to justify the belief, that preaching, instead of being regarded as an out-worn institution, will acquire and retain an influence such as it has never yet enjoyed. The suitableness of the pulpit to the circumstances of future time is the subject of which I shall treat in this discourse.

Let me begin with a *defence* of the pulpit, that I may thence pass to a more direct affirmation of its claims and its prospects. I deny not that there is occasion for the remark, that preaching is often dull and commonplace. The pulpit has doubtless exhibited what Sidney Smith called "a decent debility," and also what, in similar phrase, he might have styled a virulent violence. There is a great deal of poor preaching, we may admit, and some preaching that is worse than poor. It may even be true that comparatively few sermons indicate a high order of talent or a richly stored mind. But let two things be considered. First, that the ministry, like every other profession, includes a multitude of men of small natural gifts and inferior intellectual accomplishments. This is a consequence of the number that are called into its service. The Protestant ministers of all denominations in this country were computed a year since at more than twenty-three thousand. Of these, ought we to expect the greater part to be men of distinguished abilities? We show no such injustice towards other professions. We expect that only a few will be eminent in their several employments. The ministry need not dread a comparison, in this respect, with other professions. There are as many poor lawyers and poor physicians as there are poor preachers. There are more merchants who fail in their business than there are ministers who fail in their sermons. And, further, the pulpit has had its ornaments in every way as remarkable as any that have signalized the bar or the forum. Neither the halls of the British Parliament nor the chambers of the American Congress have ever rung with higher strains of eloquence (I speak not now of the subject-matter, but of the genius and grace that marked the performance) than have fallen from the lips of gifted men in the discourses of the sanctuary. In point of fact, therefore, I deny, as unfounded, the imputation which is cast upon the pulpit, of exhibiting only a low order of talent. But let another fact be considered by those who would properly estimate the capacities of the sermon. Many of our preachers are obliged to prepare at least one

sermon a week, and some of them two, or even more, the year through. Now I ask the man whose flippancy is ever berating the pulpit, if he would lay the same requisition on the public orator or the legal advocate. Would he demand of either of them to produce every week, nay, every month, year after year, an elaborate, finished production, worthy to be remembered for its reach of thought, its logical force, its beauty of illustration, and its glow of feeling ;— to do this, also, amidst a crowd of cares, anxieties, and duties, that are alone enough to task the full strength of common men ? No, he would be ashamed to make such a demand of any one but a minister. Why, then, in the name of justice, should he make it of the minister, who is but a man at best, and not often made of finer mould than other men ? I sometimes think, when the various labors of our profession rise before my mind, that the wonder is there is so much of even tolerable preaching, — that every year there are produced in this country at least one hundred thousand pretty good sermons, worth being preached and worth being heard. And when to these we add the ten thousand excellent discourses, and the one thousand sermons of a very high order of merit, which are annually delivered in the United States, I hold, that, whatever the clergy may think of themselves, no reasonable layman has a right, — no *reasonable* layman will be disposed to charge upon them, as a class, either indolence or inefficiency.

Let us turn now, for the actual character of preaching, to its intrinsic capabilities. These are greatly underrated, and an opinion, I believe, is spreading, that the sermon is not entitled to rank as one of the highest forms in which genius may give expression to its thought. Instead of admitting the justice of so low an estimation, we may claim for the sermon the first place among the performances of a gifted or cultivated intellect. Preaching is the highest exercise of the human powers. Eloquence never rises to such loftiness of aim or strength of persuasion, argument never handles such weighty topics, imagination never exhibits such hues of celestial brilliancy, as in the sermon. Consider for a moment the themes which it discusses, — their magnitude, and their variety : God and man ; heaven and hell ; duty, destiny, redemption, and immortality. The preacher treats of the soul, with its deep infirmities and its deeper energies, of life, with its awful significance and its profound mysteries, of the Providence that embraces the universe and guides the fall of a sparrow,

of the moral government that unites in itself the attributes of legislative and judicial authority, while it holds every human being accountable for the trusts committed to him in the facts and circumstances of his existence, of the mission, the cross, and the kingdom of Christ, of the faith which saves, the discipline which purifies, the peace which refreshes, the hope which elevates, the believer. He discourses of sin and righteousness, of repentance and pardon, of mercy and judgment, of character and condition, of time and eternity. Themes of transcendent importance, of infinite meaning ; as vast as the universe and the attributes of God, as inexhaustible as the wants and the hopes of man ! By the side of such themes, do not the topics which the orator of the courts or the senate-house treats shrink into narrowness and puerility ? Mark how various are the trains of thought which lie open to the preacher. From the great central fact of being, they run in every direction through the illimitable creation. The past, the present, and the future are his. Providence is his ; revelation is his ; the world of sense is his ; the spiritual universe is his. Everywhere may he find matter with which to enrich his discourse. Should you tell me that the uncounted stars offer but a single night's employment to the scientific observer, the assertion would not have less foundation in truth than the complaint of inevitable monotony brought against the pulpit. Consider the purposes which the preacher entertains. He seeks a higher end than the advocate who pleads for property, reputation, or life, — a result far beyond that which the political harangue contemplates. When Demosthenes kindled the fire of liberty in the hearts of his countrymen, when Cicero swayed the Conscrip^t Fathers of Rome as the wind moves the forest-trees, when Chatham made an English Parliament his submissive instrument, when Burke wrought his fervid thought into the structure of his majestic sentences, when Adams and Henry spoke freedom's language in freedom's tones, and fed a nation on their words, when the passions of an excited populace bowed before the calm, strong, noble address of Lamartine, not one of them all had in immediate view an end of such immeasurable moment as the humblest preacher who stands between the sinner and his God, and in his speech weighs eternal consequences against transitory delusions. Preaching not favorable to the exhibition of the highest gifts that man can possess ! Who is it that says

this ? One who knows the worth of the soul, — its peril, its extremity, its destiny ? One who has felt the fears of guilt, the agonies of remorse, or the tremblings of a Christian hope, the raptures of faith and love ? No, not he. It is ignorance and unbelief that can discover nothing but wearisomeness and commonplace in the topics of the pulpit, just as they can see nothing more than material elements in the memorials of the Saviour's death, — just as they can see nothing in God's great plan of providence so wonderful as the ingenious complexity of some human contrivance.

In itself considered, then, preaching is the noblest function that man can exercise. Yet by many is its glory thought to belong rather to the past than to the future, and 'some new form of influence is needed,' we are told, 'to take the place which it once held. The world will see no more eminent preachers. Happily for them whose names will be remembered, they lived when the sermon was the principal channel through which eloquence could pour its floods of truth and persuasion. Now, we must look to other modes of popular influence.' And this is said when Chalmers and Channing have just disappeared from the eyes of their contemporaries ! — Chalmers and Channing, men differing from each other as much in their mental constitution and their public efforts as in their theological conclusions, yet each proving, in his own style of Christian oratory, that the modern pulpit need not fear a comparison with former periods, whether more or less remote. Chalmers, strong, earnest, vehement, as the swell of the ocean when it beats down the walls which man has erected against its power ; Channing, gentle yet commanding, persuasive but fearless, like the morning light before whose increasing strength darkness in vain attempts to hold its dominion ; they alone afford a sufficient refutation of the charge, that the pulpit, now, only serves to protect prosaic dulness or rhetorical temerity from the disgrace which would be its just retribution. With such examples before us, we take courage while pursuing our inquiry into the adaptation of the sermon to present and future times.

Let me pause a moment before entering any farther into this inquiry, to explain what I mean by the sermon. I would connect clear and definite ideas with the word *preaching*. I mean by it the application of Christianity to the wants and circumstances of men in addresses from the pulpit. I do not mean discursive essays, or scientific lectures, or imaginative

sketches. It is the privilege of the preacher — his business and his duty — to place religious truth within the grasp of men's understandings, to bring it near and lay it upon their consciences, to pour it into their hearts. It is his province to make them apprehend their relations as moral beings, and cause them to see the stern and blessed realities of life. He must speak to the soul, as well as of the soul, and preach Christ while he preaches in Christ's name. He must show how religion is man's want and man's glory. He must apply Christianity to the habits and practices of the age in which he lives, even as the gauger applies his rule to the vessel he would measure, or the assayer his test to the metal he would prove. He must be direct and thorough in his use of Divine truth. His words must not glance from the surface, or play upon it, but must penetrate to the centre. He must make men feel their sinfulness and their duty, God's presence and God's grace, that they may "believe with the heart unto righteousness." Such should be the design and the effect of preaching.

In regard to the form of the sermon, also, I hold that it is a peculiar composition, subject to its own laws, which it cannot transgress without losing a part of its excellence. It need not have a formal division, but it should not be a crude mass of thought, nor a heap of words without thought. It need not always flow from a text written on paper, but, like a stream from a hidden source, it should flow from a Scriptural truth in the preacher's mind. The sermon should always aim at instruction or persuasion, or at what is a still higher result, the enkindling in the hearer's soul of a sympathy with the glowing and worshipping soul of the speaker; and it should be constructed on the principles which such an aim demands. Away with slovenly preaching, and away with finical preaching! Away with mean preaching, and away with ambitious preaching! Condemn them, banish them, exclude them altogether and for ever from the pulpit. I maintain the dignity of the sermon as a literary production; and when I listen to the minister, I want not something else instead of a sermon. It fills its own department of literature, and that is a department which falls below no other. A perfect sermon is at once an oration and a poem. It has unity, order, argument, sentiment, forcible thought, impassioned feeling, delicate expression. I say a *perfect* sermon. There are not many such. Why wonder at this? There is but

one "Paradise Lost" in English, but one "Oration on the Crown" in Greek. The nearer preaching comes to its perfection, the better. Therefore let it adhere to its true purpose and form. It is a foolish and a mischievous mistake, to try to shape the sermon into something that shall not remind people of its peculiar character or office. It is unwise to covet for it the nearest possible resemblance to the literature of the world. Would you disrobe the bird of paradise of its plumage, that you might make it appear like one of our domestic fowls?

Preaching, as I have now described it, is not likely to become an obsolete institution, because, as we have seen, it is suited to man's nature, and the tendencies and wants of human nature are in all ages the same; it is suited to man's condition, and the essential features of that condition remain unchanged. Preaching deals with universal and unalterable facts, with the realities of consciousness and situation. It addresses men's understandings to enlighten and convince them, reasoning with them of "righteousness and temperance and a judgment to come." It approaches their consciences to awaken and instruct them, proclaiming the terrors of the Lord and unfolding his holy commandments. It releases their affections from the thralldom of earth, that it may raise them to the Heavenly Father and the Divine Saviour. It explains their experience, and opens to them the meaning of pain and sorrow. It reproves the sinful, comforts the sad, and assists the feeble. But the sinful, the sad, and the feeble are found in every age, and into these three classes may mankind be divided; for the strongest are weak, and the happiest must feel the pressure of suffering, and the best are conscious of ill-desert. Man comes into life the same ignorant, helpless being now, that he appeared in his infancy two thousand years ago; he grows up exposed to trial and temptation, as he did then; he errs and falls; he feels his need of help, or if he do not, he needs it all the more; he feels his need of forgiveness, or if he do not, he has the more to be forgiven; he walks in a difficult and dangerous way; the grave is before him, and his path soon ends there. What is there in human nature or human condition that makes the present stand in violent contrast with the past? The native powers, the moral responsibilities, the spiritual necessities, of the race are the same in this generation that they were when Peter and Paul first preached the Gospel to their

fellow-men. Civilization has wrought only a superficial change in some of the incidents of existence. The qualities of human nature and the elements of human life remain as they were before the science or the philosophy or the social arrangements or the political institutions of our day were dreamed of. And they will remain the same when a more profound science and a wiser philosophy and a more perfect social order and yet better forms of government shall have superseded our present civilization. Men will still be born in ignorance, and will still live in sin, and still be subject to death. The world will be full of temptation, and suffering will enter the rich man's palace and the poor man's cottage ; and the soul will have its doubts and fears, its vain desires and burning remorse, its load of guilt and its heavenward aspirations, its struggles, its conflicts, its defeats, and its victories ; and men will need the revelation of Divine truth, the Gospel of God's grace, the religion of Jesus Christ, as much as ever ; and they will need the sermon and the preacher ; and they will have them both, when we and our times are forgotten. Preaching meets man's wants, inward and outward. Those wants, in great part at least, are inseparable from his birth and residence on earth. And therefore do I believe that, as long as the earth stands, the pulpit will hold its place among the means of human relief and human culture.

But while the audience before which the preacher shall appear will, in its essential characteristics, resemble the audiences that have, in past centuries, listened to his voice, the instrument which he will use, let me next observe, will also remain unchanged. This instrument is the truth which has come down from the past, through the successive revelations of the Divine will, till it found its full expression in Christianity. The Christian preacher, as we have said, applies Christianity to the character and circumstances of his hearers. But Christianity is not something different now from what it was in Wesley's time, or Luther's, or Augustin's, or Timothy's. Various interpretations of it there may be hereafter, as there already have been, and future ages may understand the records of our faith better than we or our fathers have understood them ; but Christianity undergoes no change. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," is "a true and faithful saying." The substance of the stars wastes away and is renewed ; but Christianity loses nothing and gains nothing with the lapse of ages. "Heaven and earth

shall pass away," said our Lord, "but my words shall not pass away." The Gospel of to-day is the same which was promulgated in Judea by him who cried, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"; the same which the Church should have been reiterating through all the voices of its past instruction; and the same which the true Church will repeat in its songs of thanksgiving and its lessons of counsel to the end of time. No better nor other revelation do we look for, since this is sufficient for all the purposes of personal sanctification and social regeneration for which this Gospel was needed. In Jesus we see the "Finisher," as well as the "Author," of the world's faith. Whatever progress mankind may make, they can never outrun the teaching of Christ. Whatever discoveries gifted minds may announce, whatever illumination may burst upon the people, whatever reconstruction of society may be attempted or effected, Christianity will still be the guide and guardian of human progress. And Christianity will be found always, and only, in the Christian Scriptures, — in the Bible, that register and memorial of Divine goodness, which passes down from age to age, unworn by use, unchanged by time, — in size scarce bigger than a child's hand, in worth more precious than the mines of the two hemispheres, — the study and admiration as it has been of departed generations, to become the study and admiration of our children and our children's children, to the latest posterity. To fasten men's faith upon this volume, to expound these Scriptures, to educe and unfold the Christianity which they contain, is the preacher's work. And therefore will preaching continue, an office and institution in the Church as long as the Church preserves its existence on earth.

For, again I remark, preaching is preëminently and peculiarly a Christian institution, — in its origin traceable to Christianity, in its character suited to the genius of Christianity. Paganism knew it not as one of the methods of spreading or enforcing a religious faith. There was no preaching in the heathen temples. Socrates was not a preacher, nor was Zeno, nor Seneca, nor Antoninus. Judaism did not include preaching among its sacred offices. Although the order of the Christian worship may have been borrowed in part from the Jewish synagogue, the exposition of the Law that was given in the synagogue bore little resemblance to the sermon of the early Church. Not only are we

indebted to Christianity for this form of address, but it is particularly suited for use in the service of such a religion. For Christianity appeals to the reason, while it demands the faith, of men. It informs the understanding, while it enkindles the affections. Argument and persuasion are, therefore, its appropriate methods ; and these are the constituent parts of the sermon. Were it a ceremonial religion, preaching could be only engrafted upon it, and with but doubtful success. But Christianity has no ritual ; no visible altar, nor sacerdotal pomp. It sways men through their convictions and their sympathies. How does it win their sympathies, or how create their convictions ? It has few outward signs. The water of baptism, the bread and wine of the eucharist, the cross, emblem of redemption and love, — these are its only symbols. It has no ecclesiastical institutions. The Church grew up and took shape from the divine spirit which constituted its life, but that life depended not on a particular organization. Christianity reaches and governs men through speech, — the living speech of living tongues, the written, but still living, speech of the departed. It is through language that the Gospel must come into connection with human affairs or with human souls. Now the sermon is the speech of the preacher, trembling on his lips or breathing from his page. The sermon, then, is the most appropriate means that Christianity can use for diffusing its truths, or extending its power. Put an end to preaching, and I will not say that you would prevent the spread of our religion, for it might find other means, though less effectual, for retaining or enlarging the influence it now enjoys ; but I am justified in saying that you would cripple its resources, that you would cut off the right arm of its power. So long as men remain what they are, and Christianity remains what it is, so long will the vocation of the preacher be needed, and be honored.

In this conclusion, however, all are not ready to abide, because great changes are in progress, which will create new wants and new tastes. The world, society, man, are no longer what they were, and the old methods must fall into disuse. Were the first part of this statement true, the inference is not so clear to me as it may be to others. Man, I repeat, is the same now that he was a thousand years ago, — the same alike in his capacities and in his relations. Humanity presents the same great types of character in all ages. The world is growing wiser and better, we hope. God help

it, if it be not ! But it is much the same world that it has always been, and is likely to continue the same for generations to come. Society is passing into a higher order of civilization, but it does not follow that it will leave preaching behind it. The despot and the warrior will not have a place in that higher civilization ; but may not the preacher ? He has filled a place which no one else could fill, in various stages of social progress. Preaching has travelled down through eighteen centuries, attending the diverse fortunes of the Church ; is it to stop here ? It has seen different forms of civilization, and mingled its influence with them all. It has raised its voice in the midst of Jewish, Pagan, Christian institutions, — converting thousands as its words dropped from the anointed lips of Apostles, thrilling multitudes through the golden sentences of Chrysostom, rousing nations with the appeals of Peter the Hermit, instructing the wise in the elaborate discourses of Barrow, convulsing crowds by the impetuous energy of Whitefield. There was preaching in the catacombs of Rome, and there has been preaching beneath the dome of St. Peter's. Greater yet was the company of the preachers, when Protestantism opened a new era of civilization. Preaching came with Puritanism to America, and on the soil where education and liberty have struck their deep roots, it has flourished along with them. If the past, then, contain any prophecy of the future, it is not a prediction of decay, for that which has shown such various adaptation will accommodate itself to the new circumstances of other ages.

¶ We need not, however, confine ourselves to this indirect mode of reply. Let us look at the changes which are taking place, and see whether they are such as will tend to lessen the importance of the preacher's office, or, on the contrary, will give it new dignity and efficiency. First, we are told that the reverence which was once felt for the clergy has expired, — that the minister can no longer derive a factitious advantage from his office, but must now stand, like other men, on his own merits. I hope it is so ; and I think my ministerial brethren will agree with me in rejoicing over the departure of that superstitious regard which saw in a minister something else than one of God's human creatures. We want no factitious honor, we covet no false distinction. We enter the pulpit because it is a more convenient place for public address than the floor of the house. I wear these robes because they serve to hide an awkward delivery. I desire

nothing, and I will receive nothing, on the mere ground of my profession. But is it a disadvantage to the minister that he must stand on his real merits? Will he, probably, be a less efficient preacher, because his whole influence must rest on the character of his preaching? Has he not, now, every motive to make him industrious and faithful? Is it not as certain as demonstration could make it, that preaching will improve under the necessities of this new position? And if it improve, will the age reject it? Reduce princes of the blood royal to the condition of common men, and they will show whether they have any manliness in them. So, strip off every clerical pretension that the folly of the people or the folly of the minister has ever hung about his name, and you will see whether he is worthy to teach his fellow-men. If he be worthy, believe me, they will listen to him.

Again, it is said that we are living in an age of excitement, when the people are beginning to think, and to speak out their thoughts, when society is breaking through old restraints, when conventionalism and prescription have no longer any authority, and men are pressing on rashly, wildly, but yet resolutely, towards the realization of those hopes which rest like golden clouds upon the future, reflecting the light whose full-orbed splendor our eyes are not strong enough to bear; and in such days of expectation and enterprise, the clergy will find themselves supplanted by more active spirits. But are not the clergy to feel the excitement of the times? Will not they be borne on in the great social movement of the age, or perhaps become themselves its leaders? What is there in a minister that should make him insensible to the stirring influences which act on other men? Is he only a fixture, to mark how high the stream rises? The history of revolutionary times, either here or abroad, does not so describe him. The history of social progress does not so represent him. The clergy, as a class, are neither impracticable nor lethargic. It is an old slander, that the clergy always oppose social advancement, and it is a slander which every popular movement since the Reformation has refuted. The pulpit receives and transmits the electricity of the times; and if it leads it off in safer directions than it might follow, were it left to take its own course, shall we therefore bring against the pulpit the charge of insensibility to the character of the times? It is justly liable to no such charge.

I would consider this objection from another point of view.

We do live in an age of excitement, when the barriers of ancient restraint are broken down, and the people are exercising their new freedom, often to their own harm. In such a period the pulpit occupies a position held by no other instrumentality, — a position of the utmost importance and of great responsibility. It is the mediating power between the conservatism and the radicalism that stand in hostile relations, and threaten, by their opposite tendencies, to tear society in pieces. Never is the preacher more needed than at such a period ; and never is his influence more felt. The minister of that religion which recognizes at once the principles of permanence and of progress, — which points with one hand to the past as the birthplace of wisdom, and with the other to the future as the seat of its empire, — which repeats the great ideas of faith, order, and authority, to which the world must cling, if it would not be overwhelmed by its own passions, yet proclaims, and has been for ages proclaiming, what modern revolution adopts as its watchwords, liberty, equality, and fraternity, — the minister of the religion of freedom and love, the minister of Christ, the universal Friend, — he is the proper person to interpret to each party, on the great questions which now agitate the depths of society, the purposes of the opposite party, and to each party often its own purposes, — to promote both a good understanding and a mutual respect, — to soften bigotry and cure fanaticism, on whichever side they may appear. And let me say, — not in a tone of reckless arrogance, but from a desire to render simple justice to the clerical profession, — that its members, as a body, have not shown themselves insensible to the responsibilities of their situation. Look at the relation they sustain to the reforms of the day, moral, political, or social ; always ready to examine their claims, sometimes compelled to pronounce the schemes of ardent philanthropists unsound or dangerous, but more often prompt to give their assistance, and not seldom found among the foremost and firmest friends of the enterprise. Preaching never had such scope nor such pertinency as now. If it were not in existence, the times would create it. The pulpit is the muniment of modern society.

I have adverted to the circumstances which surround the preacher, as bringing him into new relations to the community, and giving him new opportunities of influence. Let me point out another advantage which he may derive from

the character of the present age, in the materials which it offers to his use. Besides those great themes, arguments, and illustrations, which, as we have seen, belong to all times, there are two characteristics of our age which tend to increase the resources of the pulpit. One is that very activity of social life to which I have just alluded, — opening continually new plans and stimulating new efforts. What a multitude of topics now solicit the preacher's attention, which a quarter of a century ago were thought to lie without his province, or, rather, had not become subjects of thought either with him or with others ! Does any one doubt that the pulpit has a larger field of observation spread before it than it had in the last generation ; or that it takes a broader and a deeper survey of society ? Discussion has a wider range everywhere else. Is it limited, restricted to its former boundaries, pent up, imprisoned, here ? No. It has the whole consciousness and expression of humanity submitted to its notice, all human interests as they are every day unfolding or changing their character, all human relations as they are evolved from the incessant course of events, all human wants as they publish themselves in more or less articulate speech. Christianity is constantly finding new occasion for the development of its truths, and therefore he whose office it is to expound these truths has a constantly increasing service to render. But, secondly, ours is an age of extraordinary scientific and mechanical activity. Discovery and invention have in our own day accomplished such wonders, that we cease to feel surprise at their most brilliant results. The astronomer has penetrated the depths of space, the chemist has revealed the secret forces of nature, the geologist has opened the pages of a book more ancient than the race of man, the engineer has constructed machines that travel over mountains and across rivers with a strength generated and sustained within themselves, the thought of man uses the fluid of the skies as its means of visible expression, the agonies of disease are quelled by the subtle vapor, and every day adds some new fact to the knowledge which is the common possession of all classes of the people. What immense variety of illustration is here placed within the reach of the Christian orator or writer ! How may he enrich his discourses with the fruits of other men's labors ! Who would have thought, ten years ago, of a sermon on roads, or on an aqueduct for supplying the physical wants of a city ? Yet very good

themes have they afforded, that have been well handled. Religious truth is every day finding some new ground on which to enter, some new illustration on which to seize.

I cannot but notice another distinction of our times, that promises to add weight to the discourses of the pulpit. It is, perhaps, the most marked peculiarity of the period in which we live, that both thought and speech have acquired an almost boundless freedom. Tongues are unloosed, and minds are unbound. I have already alluded to this quality of our age as stimulating the preacher's exertions. I now adduce it as directly suited to render the services of the pulpit at once more instructive and more popular in their character than they have ever been. With less of the old method, there will be a force and appositeness which the old method lacked. Preaching will become more lively without losing its seriousness, and more free without sacrificing its dignity. Do we not already observe signs of such a change? I believe there was never so little dull preaching on this continent as now. Every denomination in the land feels the currents of life flowing faster through its veins, and this quickened circulation of the truth which is its lifeblood gives a warmer glow to the expression of its faith. The pulpit has been accused of unfaithfulness to the interests of humanity. I have denied the justice of this imputation; but for the present argument it matters not whether it be true or false. If, in times past, preaching has been cold, technical, professional, then its manifest improvement in our own day is an augury of its increasing power. If it has not been negligent, timid, or mechanical, then the improvement to which I refer shows that it is not only capable of yet nobler efforts, but that this capacity will not remain a buried talent. I speak of an actual improvement in the preaching of the Christian Church, for of the fact I entertain no doubt. In various particulars do we witness here the effect of that freedom which is either subverting or revivifying all the institutions of the world. First, preaching has acquired greater simplicity, and therefore greater facility of adaptation to the circumstances of the hour. An artificial and cumbrous order has given place to a more natural, popular, and effective style of address. Then, it has become more earnest; the preacher talks more as if he were pleading the great cause of truth and right against delusion and sin. Then, it is more manly; the preacher relies more on his own honest conviction, and more on

the intelligent sympathies of his audience. And, finally, there is more real life in the pulpit, more genuine utterance, more fervid conception and more strong exhibition of the grand principles of faith and duty. You may see this in opposite quarters. Let any one read the sermons that the Tractarian divines put forth in England five or six years since, and he will feel that those men were in earnest. Let any one compare the preaching of the Presbyterian or the Baptist denomination with what it was ten years ago, and he will perceive signs of progress. Preaching is better than it was in our fathers' time, and to argue that it will in future deteriorate is as if one should interpret convalescence as a precursor of death.

There remains yet one consideration, stronger than all, which makes me hopeful respecting the pulpit. The general intelligence, the growing and spreading intelligence of the times, this will uphold the pulpit. The wiser men become, — as they better understand themselves and the religion in which they believe, — the clearer will be their discernment of the fitness of this instrument to accomplish great services in behalf of humanity. In reference to other methods which the Church has adopted for maintaining its spiritual life, we may predict a different result. They rest on authority, and authority that cannot justify itself to the reason of men is crumbling away from beneath every institution, political or ecclesiastical, of past ages. Preaching rests on the intellectual assent and moral sympathies of the people. It is an appeal to their hopes and their fears through their convictions. The more general the diffusion of knowledge, the more enlightened the people become, the better able will they be to appreciate the privileges of instruction. Preaching is not a product of barbarism nor a device of tyranny. The baron of the Middle Ages went to mass, but not to sermon. The autocrat of the Russias is willing his subjects should gaze on a priesthood clad in gorgeous vestments and performing solemn rites, but he is careful how they listen to a ministry discoursing on the great themes of freedom and hope. But the days of kingly craft and priestly pomp have nigh come to an end. When men burn thrones, they ask for something more in their churches than lighted altars or liturgical performances. They demand counsel, truth, help, light for the mind, love for the heart, strength and liberty for the soul. They call for a solution

of the problems which their experience includes, but cannot interpret, the problems of society and life. They call upon religion, not to crush, but to raise them, — not to mock, but to relieve them. Their demands are reasonable and right. In God's name, let them be answered. But by whom? By the politician? No. He will discuss measures of government, when men require principles of action. By the scholar? No. He lives in the past; the people need some one to lead them who is living, like themselves, in the present. The ethical writer? No. He deals in theories and speculations; men want discourses drawn from the fountains of being. The minister, the preacher, the Christian preacher, he is the man to answer the questions of suffering, struggling, impatient humanity. He is the man for these times, for the coming times, — the times of inquiry and effort, the times of "refreshment from the presence of the Lord." He is the man to meet the necessities of an hour when the covering of falsehood is to be torn off from life, and its severe realities, fearful in aspect, but gracious in their issues, are to be interpreted to the consciousness of the world. He is the one whom the world wants, and to whom men will listen; he, who will tell them of God the Father, of Christ the Saviour, of the immortal destiny of the soul, of the sacred law of duty, of love, and peace, and hope. He, their fellow-man, yet their instructor, — he, with the prophet's inspiration and the brother's heart, — he, who has knelt and wept before the cross of Christ, till he knows how to kneel and weep with them whom Christ came to save, — he, who has caught the strains of heaven's melody proclaiming "peace on earth, good-will to men," and can pour them into the ears of the populace groaning beneath the miseries and the passions which belong to earth, — he, who claims nothing in his own name, and every thing in the holy names of freedom, truth, and religion, — he is the man whom the world will welcome and will honor, whose office they will sustain, whose functions they will respect, whose services they will claim. And, thank God! the ministry is responding to the call which is already made upon it. Yes. From the bosom of the Papal Church is there a response. It is no accidental thing, nor an insignificant fact, that — not after the popular will had hurled the king from his throne, but when monarchy was pressing its iron heel into the people's heart — the most celebrated preacher of the Roman Catholic faith in Paris said to the

crowds that filled the aisles of Notre Dame, — “The interests of the Church are those of humanity, and the interests of humanity are those of the Church. Christianity, of which the Church is the living body, arrived at its present degree of lofty power by means alone of the profound relations which exist between it and humanity. Modern society is the expression of the wants of humanity, and in consequence it is also the expression of the wants of the Church.” I do not believe those words were spoken in a jesuitical spirit of compromise with the times. They are worthy of Christianity, they are honorable to the Communion by whose organ they were pronounced.

With such a spirit breathing through the Romish Church, even there will preaching furnish an answer, and the needed answer, to the questions which freedom and intelligence shall propound. But Romanism is not to be the religion of future centuries. It is extending itself in this country just now, from obvious and temporary causes. But it is tottering in the seats of its ancient power. Nor is it the religion which ages of freedom and intelligence will accept. I do not believe that such ages will cherish *any* hierarchical institutions. Democracy is the destiny of the world in politics, and democracy is its destiny in religion. And, fathers and brethren, — let me say it, with all proper respect for other forms of discipline, but in a profound and grateful admiration of that system of church polity which we have inherited from our Pilgrim ancestors, — the only practical democracy in religion is to be found in Congregationalism. Now in our Congregational churches preaching ever has been, and ever will be, the chief means of moral impression. It will hold a prominent place, a place second to none other except domestic teaching, among the means of spiritual culture adopted by the members of these churches. So long as Congregationalism shall endure, will the preacher be called to exercise his vocation.

Let me glance at yet one other characteristic of future times, which connects the pulpit with the progress of our race. In the ages that will succeed our own, perhaps at no great distance, Christianity will be brought into such contact with the institutions of society, the opinions of the thoughtful, and the habits of the busy and the practical, as it has never yet had. The application of Christianity to life is the great work of the future ; a work which it remains for the future

to do, and which it will do. The interests of Christian faith and of active duty must cease to be regarded as separate, or even as allied ; they must be blended and made identical. The life of man, of the individual, of society, of the world, must be penetrated, pervaded, filled with the truth and spirit of Christ. It is the infusion of this truth and spirit, that will make the coarse and homely perfectly beautiful. In the hands of the Bohemian workman the colorless glass glows with the hues of the rainbow, not laid upon it nor shining through it, but mingled with it, so that every part and particle exhibits his success, and you can efface the proof of his skill only by destroying the substance itself. In like manner should Christianity be incorporated with the whole life of the world, making it all beautiful, all divine. It seems to me that I behold the signs of an approach to this consummation. In the various schemes of philanthropy and reform that distinguish our age I see a Christian element. It is this that gives them their value. Sometimes the source whence that element was drawn is not acknowledged. Still, through these agencies Christianity is getting access to the errors and miseries that afflict mankind, and they are preparing the way for another generation intelligently and gratefully to take up the work of applying Christian truth to human concerns, — to government, to trade, to the organization of society, to all the relations that unite men and all the interests that affect them. Now under whose guidance is another generation to pursue this work ? To whom shall it look for encouragement and counsel ? To whom, if not to him whose peculiar function it is to exhibit the methods and the results of that application of Christianity to human affairs which was intended by its Divine Author ? We have seen that this is the special business of the preacher ; and now we see that in this way he will meet the special necessities and demands of future times. Is it not clear, then, that, so far from being neglected or left behind, preaching will occupy hereafter a position and command an influence such as it has never enjoyed ? I can understand how the world may learn to do without the statesman, the magistrate, or even the schoolmaster ; but I do not see how in the stages of its future progress it can dispense with the Christian preacher. As the character of that progress defines itself to my view, it seems to me that he will be needed more and more, and will find continually increasing opportunities for the discharge of his peculiar function.

It is said, indeed, that other modes of social influence, being better suited to the higher and freer culture which will mark future periods of human history, will supersede preaching. I had intended to give this remark the attention which it deserves, but I must confine myself to the briefest notice. The other methods on which reliance is placed, by those who believe that mankind will outgrow the instruction of the pulpit, are the popular lecture, public discussion, and the press. Bear with me while I add a word on each of these points. A few years ago, one might have spoken of the success of the popular lecturer, or rather of the position which he would hold before the community, with less confidence than he may now feel in the opinion he shall express. The experiment has been made fairly, and, I think, thoroughly. And what is the result? That the lecturer is likely to supplant the preacher? By no means. That the church will be forsaken for the lyceum? By no means. That, in some rare instances, the delivery of lectures, literary or scientific, may be made the employment of a man's life, his profession, and the means of his support, and that the public will maintain this as a permanent source of instruction and entertainment, are points upon which there can remain little doubt. But that it will ever be adopted as an essential or principal means of moral influence, or even of intellectual culture, the experience of the last five years shows to be utterly improbable. Besides, let it be considered that a lecture on any one of the great topics of religious faith or the Christian life is virtually a sermon. It may be called by another name, but Cæsar does not cease to be Cæsar because you style him Augustus. It may have no text, but a book is still a book, though it want the title-page. It may be delivered in a hall instead of a meeting-house, but the longest sermon that the Apostle Paul ever preached (for "he continued his speech until midnight") was in an upper chamber. It is not the place that makes the sermon. It is the discourse that makes the cavern, or the open hill-side, a Christian sanctuary.

As to public discussion, or the less ambitious form of the social conference, it is plain that this can never take the place of the pulpit, for the simple reason, that the one is suited to one class of wants and tastes, and the other to another class. Men will have them both, — more conference and more discussion, — but not less preaching, I think. Men love to talk, and they love to listen, too. They like to cherish their

social sympathies, and they like to sit in the presence of one who, for the time, sustains to them the relation of a teacher. They may frequent the open meeting, where tongue sharpeneth tongue ; but, unless I greatly mistake both their judgments and their inclinations, they will not forego the quiet and decent order of God's house.

The press is destined to become, it has already become, an instrument of the mightiest power. It can raise up, and it can bring down. It can enlighten ignorance, and it can exasperate prejudice. It can scatter instruction broadcast, that shall spring up in blessing, and it can sow the seeds of universal ruin. But it will not render preaching needless or unacceptable. The pulpit will use the press as its ally and its servant, but it will not be driven by the press from its rightful position in the community. The charm and the power of the living voice cannot be transferred to leaden types. You cannot print the tone, the look, the manner. You cannot make a book a man. And therefore will the preacher always retain his office, and be held in due estimation.

I will add but a single remark in illustration of the truth, that the press can never do the preacher's work ; and I detain you while I offer it, because, though I can here present it only as an incidental illustration, it might have been made a topic of distinct and cogent argument. The press cannot supply the wants which Christian men will always feel in connection with the Lord's day. The Lord's day ! that is a perpetual institution. The stars may be plucked from the skies sooner than that can be torn from the reverence and love of Christian hearts. Men may hold meetings, make speeches, pass resolutions, write pamphlets, to prove that all days of the week are alike ; but in vain. They will not be believed, for the wants of man's nature that demand social worship, and the labors incident to his condition that create the need of rest, and the associations of his faith that hallow the morning of the Saviour's resurrection, will all pronounce the assertion false. The Lord's day ! it will come to our children, and to their children, and to the generations that shall follow them, through uncounted ages ; it will come and be welcomed, and the people will "go up to the house of the Lord in company," and will there "keep holy time." And then and there will the preacher stand up and speak to the assembled congregation of him who passed through the grave for their sake, and rose that they might

live. Then and there will the preacher stand up and discourse on the themes appropriate to the place and the day.

Friends and hearers, I have wearied your patience ; but how little have I said, how much have I left unsaid ! Let us not part till I have suggested the use which we may make of the conclusion to which these remarks have been intended to lead us.

I speak to my fathers and brethren in the ministry ; and I say to them, — Magnify the preacher's office. It is the highest you can fill : bring to it your best gifts, your most devoted service. Be faithful as pastors, be faithful in all your social and personal duties, but be preëminently faithful in your preparation for the pulpit. Enter it as if it were the loftiest position you could take on earth. Preach as if you felt that the glory of God and the salvation of men depended on your words. Preach as if you felt that through you Christ himself drew near to the souls of the people. Bring nothing here which you have not carefully meditated, — nothing, oh ! nothing, which you do not believe as you believe in your own immortal being, — nothing which shall be a mere perfunctory utterance, a mere profane babbling. Magnify your office as preachers, for your own sake and for the sake of your congregations.

I speak to members of those congregations ; and I say to them, — Honor the pulpit ; cling to it ; vindicate it from false imputation ; and let it not lose its just place in men's regards through your silence or your neglect. Value preaching, and show that you value it by attending upon it. Do not discredit the sermon by esteeming every other form into which the human mind can cast its thoughts as superior to this. Neither make it the occasion of frivolous literary criticism. Criticize the preacher's discourse as you would criticize a voice from the unseen world, for his discourse should be the fruit of communion with that world. The preacher "takes of the things of God, and sheweth them unto man." All that is sublime, all that is tender, all that is true, — the unmeasurable depths of Christianity, the infinite meaning of life, the harmonies and differences of the universe, — these things are his study. Allow him to ponder such themes. Give him time to prepare his discourses. Do not expect or desire him to sacrifice the excellence of his preaching to the fidelity of his pastoral service. Demand of the minister that he preach well ; and when he preaches well, honor him for his work's sake, and honor his work for your own sakes.

I speak to some who may be hesitating in regard to their future employment in life ; and I say to them, — If you would choose the most honorable service, if you would exercise the highest function within the reach of man, if you desire to place yourselves in the most enviable position on earth, if you would select your profession on the ground of intrinsic worth or relative influence, enter the ministry ; because then you can *preach*, and there is no relation that you can hold to your fellow-men so important, no trust so responsible, no work so great, as the preacher's. Pass it not by as if it would not give scope to the largest talent, or opportunity of expression to the loftiest purpose. Young men ! if your hearts have felt the love of Christ, become preachers of his Gospel for the sake of its blessed truth, of his great sacrifice, and of your own everlasting joy.

I speak to those who will now be invited to increase the amount of relief or comfort that may be distributed among the widows and children of deceased ministers, and to them I say, — Those ministers were preachers. They loved the pulpit, and have associated their names with its history and its influence. Show that you honor their memories, show that you honor the work to which they gave their strength, show that you justly appreciate the responsibilities and labors of the Christian preacher, by giving to those whom a single-hearted devotion to the ministry has left in need of your bounty. If you care not whether the independence, the dignity, and the power of the pulpit be maintained, by enabling those who perform its offices to cast off the burden and bondage of worldly anxiety, then give nothing or give sparingly. But if you would relieve the incumbent of the pulpit from a painful solicitude respecting those whom he may leave behind him, if you would help to make the pulpit what it should be, — pleasant in the experience of him who stands there, and honorable in the eyes of the people of the land, — then give according to your ability ; and your gift shall be returned upon your own hearts, in the blessings of the widow and the fatherless, in the conviction that you have aided a great interest of humanity, in the satisfaction you shall derive from knowing that you have upheld an institution to whose efficiency future times will bear witness, and in the favor of him whose Gospel has been preached to those who believe in his name, that they may partake of his spirit of love, and imitate his example of beneficence.

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 9470
For renewals call (510) 64

All items are subject to

